



Idaho Farm Update

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North Idaho

Harvest has been over for a few weeks, and there will be no job opportunities on most farms until haying begins in late spring. In the next two weeks, ornamental tree nurseries in Bonner and Boundary counties will hire workers to help with harvest and shipping. The extra jobs at the tree nurseries normally end around Thanksgiving. Christmas tree farms in Boundary and Bonner counties also will begin hiring workers in two or three weeks to help with harvest. Those extra jobs will end at Christmas. Workers at tree nurseries and tree farms typically earn between \$6.50 and \$8 per hour.

Southwestern Idaho

Farmers in southwestern Idaho are still chopping corn and harvesting onions, potatoes and sugar beets, and they are hiring equipment operators and truck drivers to haul silage at \$6.50 to \$9 an hour depending on experience. Beekeepers are also in demand starting at \$8 an hour but going higher based on experience. Field workers at \$6 an hour are needed for the chili pepper harvest, and general farm laborers are being paid \$6.75 to \$8.50 an hour for fixing and building fence, maintaining machinery, irrigating and tending livestock. Seed farmers are paying around \$8 an hour for workers to clean, set up and operate harvest machinery. Farmers are also paying \$7.25 to \$8 an hour for workers to sort and grade onions and potatoes. Area onion sheds are up and running and still hiring workers at \$5.75 per hour. The influx of new dairies to the region as milk prices remain high is generating demand for workers at between \$1,600 and \$2,000 a month plus the promise of year-round employment. Southwestern Idaho will likely continue seeing a dairy expansion and an accompanying increase in the number of higher quality agricultural jobs over the next two years.

South Central Idaho

The agricultural season is nearing the end. Dry bean, sugar beet and potato harvests are under way. There are a few jobs, albeit for short periods, for potato harvesters, equipment operators and truck drivers, paying \$6 to \$10 an hour depending on the equipment operated. Sheep and cattle are being brought down from the high country to winter grazing areas, offering only a few, brief opportunities for employment. Only dairies are still hiring, and there are just a few openings for milkers at \$22,000 to \$28,000 a year plus benefits and relief milkers at \$8.50

to \$10 per hour. These jobs should be steady through the winter. This year produced good crops, and water was adequate due to a very wet spring. But reservoir levels are very low now. American Falls Reservoir, one of the main suppliers to south central Idaho, was at only 10 percent capacity. There are efforts to settle the dispute between groundwater and spring water users before a judge steps in. A normal to above normal winter and 2005-2006 water year are critical to next year's production.

Southeastern Idaho

Fall harvest is well under way in southeastern Idaho and will continue through mid-November. Growers are wrapping up potato, corn and sugar beet harvests, planting winter wheat, preparing fields for winter and moving beef cattle to market. Workers are needed throughout the area until mid-November when the sugar beet harvest is completed. Farmers are hiring potato and beet harvest workers at \$7 to \$8.63 an hour, harvest equipment operators at \$8 to \$10 per hour, truck drivers at \$7 to \$8 per hour and dairy workers at \$7 an hour or \$60 a day.

East Central Idaho

Sunny skies interrupted by overcast and rainy days have challenged farmers in east central Idaho. Hay, alfalfa and grain have been successfully harvested so potatoes and corn for silage are the only crops left. Potato harvest has started in most areas but has been hampered by rain every other day. When fields are too wet, machinery gets stuck or does not function properly. Nights have dipped below freezing, another threat to the potato crop if potatoes are exposed to or being transported in the cold. So the harvest is in the customary watch-and-wait stage but should be completed in the next two weeks with minor field preparation for the next crop come spring. Still being hired are sheepherders at \$750 a month plus room and board, milkers at \$6 to \$7 an hour, 10-wheel truck drivers at \$7 to \$8.50 per hour, grain samplers at \$9 per hour, farm equipment and piler operators at \$5.75 to \$6 an hour and general farm laborers at \$6 to \$7 per hour.

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